

Testimony of the Honorable Jason Altmire
The House Committee on Veterans' Affairs
Subcommittee on Health
April 26, 2007

I would like to thank Chairman Michaud, Ranking Member Miller and members of the committee for the opportunity to testify today about H.R. 1944, the Veterans Traumatic Brain Injury Act of 2007, bipartisan legislation that I introduced to increase the screening and treatment of traumatic brain injuries (TBI) for our nation's veterans.

Mr. Chairman, we are facing an impending crisis in this country. Our brave men and women are returning from Iraq and Afghanistan with TBI at an alarming rate. Of those treated at Walter Reed Army Medical Center, 65 percent have been diagnosed with TBI as a primary or co-morbid diagnosis. Many now consider TBI to be the signature injury of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

I am concerned that the Veterans Affairs Administration may not be properly identifying and treating TBI among the nation's veterans. It is estimated that more than half of all combat casualties have associated brain injuries. Most of them include mild TBI, which is often missed in initial exams as physicians attend to other more apparent injuries.

The Veterans Traumatic Brain Injury Act improves the coordination of TBI care for our nation's veterans by requiring the Veterans Affairs Administration to screen veterans for symptoms, develop and operate a comprehensive program of long-term care for post-acute TBI rehabilitation, establish TBI transition offices at all poly-trauma network sites, and create and maintain a TBI veteran health registry.

In our first four months, the 110th Congress has taken enormous strides in meeting its commitment to veterans. We have provided more than \$11 billion in increased funding for veterans' health care and

passed the Wounded Warrior Assistance Act to improve the management of their medical care.

I believe that we owe no greater debt than to our veterans and, while we have made some progress, we can do more to improve their health care. To this end, the bipartisan Veterans Traumatic Brain Injury Act will allow us to properly screen America's returning heroes for TBI and improve their treatment.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. I would be pleased to answer any questions that you may have.